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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - THE PRESIDENCY DEVELOPS A STAFF-LEVEL
PERSONALITY

REF: SARAJEVO 510

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas McElhaney for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Bosnian Tri-Presidency has begun to develop a staff that can serve their respective bosses. On a day-to-day basis the vast majority of our contact with the Presidency takes place at the staff level, which has provided an important avenue for influencing their bosses' thinking and advancing U.S. policy objectives in Bosnia. Though the new Tri-Presidency -- Bosniak Haris Silajdzic, Serb Nebojsa Radmanovic, and Croat Zelkjo Komsic -- assumed office in November 2006, it took several weeks for each to assemble his "cabinet." Our interactions with each has provided us with insights into the internal dynamics of the Presidency as an institution and the personalities of Silajdzic, Radmanovic, and Komsic. Silajdzic has assembled a staff of acolytes, who tend to reinforce his worst tendencies rather than provide him with countervailing political advice. By contrast, Radmanovic is served by a group of non-ideological pragmatists. Somewhat surprisingly, Komsic's staff lacks gravity and seems focused on issues other than their day jobs. It is early in each man's tenure, and our assessment of his staff may change, but thus far, the Serbs have been our most reliable and effective interlocutors - a significant change from the previous Presidency. END SUMMARY.

THREE "CABINETS"

12. (SBU) Each member of the Bosnian Tri-Presidency employees a small group of advisors, collectively known as his "cabinet." The Presidency's primary constitutional responsibility is for foreign affairs and defense, though it also proposes, upon recommendation of the Council of Ministers, the government's annual budget to the Parliamentary Assembly. Given these responsibilities, each member of the Presidency employs foreign policy and finance/economic advisors, but beyond these core competencies there is little consistency from member-to-member in the structure and responsibilities of their cabinets. Personal preferences as much as the Presidency's constitutional role have shaped the cabinets of Silajdzic, Radmanovic, and Komsic. For example, Silajdzic employs an "Advisor for Constitutional and Legal Affairs," Radmanovic has a "Security Advisor," and Komsic has an "Advisor for Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations." These positions are unique to their respective cabinets.

13. (C) Though the policy interests vary from cabinet to cabinet, the three cabinets do have some things in common. All are small, just 6 to 7 people. Radmanovic also maintains an office in Banja Luka, and several members of his cabinet spend the majority of their time in the RS, which makes his Sarajevo-based staff even smaller. Each member of the Tri-Presidency also employs a cadre of young, 30-something staffers, who complement their generally older Chiefs of Cabinet. Most of these political newcomers have a good command of the English language; several have studied in the U.S. or UK at the high school or university level. Despite their small size and generational similarities, there is little formal coordination among the three cabinets. The foreign policy advisors do not have weekly meetings to discuss issues of common concern, for example. (Note: At an event we recently hosted for Presidency staff, among others, the staff tended to cluster together with colleagues from the same office rather than mix with one another. End Note.)

SILAJDZIC'S OFFICE: ACOLYTES AND IDEOLOGUES

14. (C) Silajdzic is a prickly interlocutor. Though his staff are much more approachable, they are no less dogmatic in their world view. The two men we deal with most often, Sjefudin Hodzic, Foreign Policy Advisor for Europe, Asia and Africa (Note: Silajdzic's has not yet hired a foreign policy advisor for North America. End Note.), and Damir Arnaut, Advisor for Constitutional and Legal Affairs, have, like Silajdzic, spent much of the post-Dayton period outside Bosnia; Hodzic in the UK, and Arnaut in the U.S. Hodzic did experience the war, however. Like many expatriate Bosnians, Hodzic and Arnaut do not understand how their country has

changed over the last 12 years, and they filter Bosnian politics in 2007 through the lens of 1992-1995. Both men characterize Dodik as another Karadzic or Milosevic, for example. They also expect the international community, particularly the U.S., to support the Bosniak political agenda and intervene to impose it if necessary, just as we intervened in the mid-1990s to end the war.

15. (C) Silajdzic's staff also approach their work with the same zeal as their boss and have tremendous faith in his political judgment. In any discussion, Silajdzic's staff are quick to lay claim to the moral high ground, which makes it difficult for them to consider compromise solutions to political disputes. For example, rather than negotiate with the Serbs about Silajdzic's proposal to amend Bosnia's Law on Citizenship, Silajdzic's staff told us that they would demand Serb support, and if it was not forthcoming, they would seek to publicly shame the Serbs into accepting it (Reftel). Silajdzic's staff also believe passionately in his goal of undoing the Dayton settlement and are sharply critical of the U.S. for its failure to overturn what they perceive as a grave injustice to Bosniaks. Arnaut, a former State Department lawyer, provided Silajdzic with the bulk of the misleading legal arguments he has used to attack the U.S.-brokered package of constitutional amendments. After exchanges with Silajdzic's staff, one often walks away with a sense that their role is less to advise the President than proselytize for him.

RADMANOVIC'S OFFICE: PROFESSIONALS AND PRAGMATISTS

16. (C) Since the new Presidency assumed office in November, we have developed the closest and most effective relationship with Bosnian-Serb President Radmanovic's cabinet. Radmanovic's advisors, particularly Danilo Petrovic (who is engaged to Radmanovic's daughter) and Security Advisor Dzuro Beronja, have pro-actively sought out to open avenues of communication with the Embassy. The 27 year-old Petrovic serves as a Foreign Policy Advisor for the President, attends most official meetings and usually accompanies his boss on work and private trips. Despite his relative youth and the concerns over nepotism, Petrovic, who speaks fluent English,

has proven a competent and knowledgeable interlocutor who can directly convey messages from Radmanovic to the Embassy and vice-versa. Unlike many Bosnian officials, Radmanovic's staffers are always well-prepared for meetings, pro-actively follow-up on issues of mutual interest, and keep their Embassy contacts well-informed of pending issues on our agenda.

17. (C) Petrovic and Beronja consistently express the philosophy, which they say is dictated by their boss, that they are our partners in pursuing a "rational approach" to policy in Bosnia. In that regard, they note we will face no problems or obstacles realizing our agenda on issues of mutual interest. In areas in which we have a difference of opinion, the staffers pledge to maintain an open and frank dialogue. To date, they have stuck to that approach and have made efforts to develop a productive joint relationship. Lately, Radmanovic's staff has been keen to share with us their "perceptions" of the inner-workings of the Presidency, and have increasingly complained about what they label the "pure obstructionism" of President Silajdzic. They claim that Silajdzic and his staff have engaged in activities and violations of internal procedure that have made the collective Presidency increasingly dysfunctional.

KOMSIC'S OFFICE: NOT READY FOR PRIME TIME?

18. (C) Before the new Presidency took office, we had assumed that we would develop the most productive relationship in the Presidency with Bosnian-Croat President Komsic and his cabinet. We viewed Komsic, the young, talented and well-regarded former Sarajevo municipal official, as someone who would exercise real leadership within the Presidency in moving our joint agenda forward. This has largely not developed as expected. The President has lately seemed adrift on policy issues and his staff at times has appeared unprepared to fulfill their duties. Several of Komsic's advisors have other employment, including his Chief of Staff

and top aide Amir Ibrovic, who owns and runs a popular local bar. The same is true for Economic Advisor Boris Tihi, who is also a professor at the Sarajevo Institute for Economics. Legal Advisor Dijana Tabori, who attended high school in Richmond, Virginia, was recently absent for over two weeks while she worked on her masters' degree in Rome. We have also found that Foreign Policy Advisor, and former Bosnian Ambassador to Turkey Nerkez Arifhodzic, frequently travels outside Bosnia.

19. (C) The advisors' frequent absences make it difficult for us to get meetings when we have a pressing issue to discuss. When they are available, we have found that Komsic's staff has been uninformed and ill-prepared to discuss policy issues, a concern seconded by Radmanovic's staff. This naturally creates a vacuum in developing Komsic's attitudes towards some foreign policy and defense issues, one that has at times been filled by Silajdzic. In a recent example, Komsic acted to block Presidency approval of the retirement of General Grabovica, a corrupt former Bosniak general and Silajdzic ally. Only after CHOD Lt. Gen. Sifet Podzic, Komsic's wartime military commander, personally intervened and explained the necessity to retire Grabovica did Komsic relent.

COMMENT

110. (C) The personalities of the Presidency staffs have certainly shaped the dynamics of the institution and our interactions with it. Silajdzic has surrounded himself with like-thinking ideologues who probably do not present the President with differing perspectives on issues. Conversely, Radmanovic has employed a professional, open-minded and competent staff. Komsic, for reasons that remain unclear, is staffed by individuals who lack the level of professional focus needed for their positions.

¶11. (C) Predictably, Silajdzic's advisors have antagonized Radmanovic's office and they have also proven a poor conduit for us to moderate the worst tendencies of their boss. Poor staff work has probably played a role in what outsiders see as Komsic's recent drift into Silajdzic's orbit within the Presidency (e.g. Grabovica). Early in the administration, the surprise is that the Bosnian-Serb member of the Presidency is a good partner on a host of bilateral issues, including the continuation of Bosnian deployments to Iraq and approving the ammunition donation to Afghanistan. This is due in part to the role of Radmanovic's advisors, who have adopted a professional and pragmatic approach in their outlook and have sought to cultivate strong ties between the Embassy and their office.

MCELHANEY